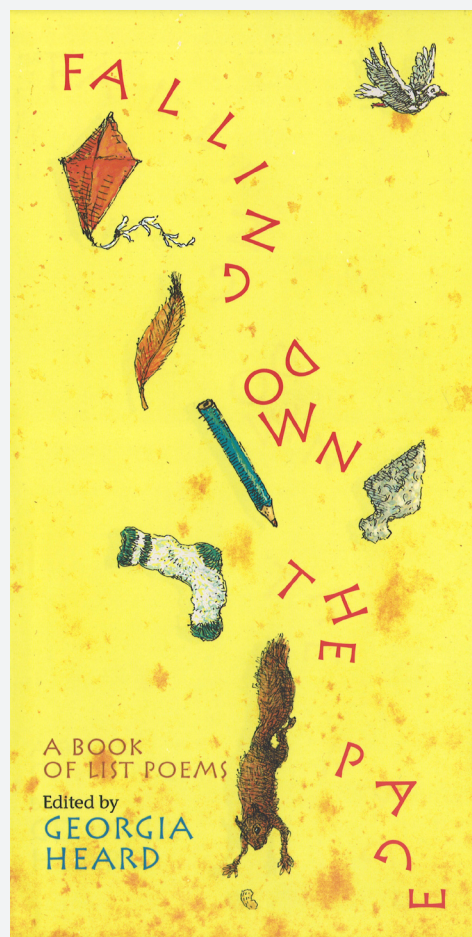


## First Opinion: Poetry Where You Least Expect It

Heard, Georgia, ed. *Falling Down the Page: A Book of List Poems*. NY: Roaring Brook Press, 2009.

George Shannon



One of the continual misconceptions about poetry is that it is apart from daily life. Those unsure about poetry assume poets reach out to some netherworld, find poetry, and then bring it back to the regular world. Poets and poetry lovers know the opposite is true. Poetry exists in the daily world. The poet's gift is to help us see it. *Falling Down the Page* is a satisfying collection of poems offering experiential evidence that the daily world and the poet's world are one and the same.

Heard has gathered “list poems” as varied as “In My Desk” by Jane Yolen, “Winter’s Presents” by Patricia Hubbell, and “Chorus of Four Frogs” by David Harrison. They explore and celebrate the simple, daily realities of a school desk, the effects of winter, and the sounds of frogs.

Equal to the best poems in this collection is Heard’s introduction. If there is a poetry form subject to more misunderstanding and poor teaching than haiku, it is the list poem. Just as haiku is far more than merely 17 syllables broken into lines of 5-7-5, the list poem is far more than a list. Because it is so easily misunderstood, it is also one of the richest possibilities for helping children discover the poetry in their daily lives. Time and again, these poems bring life to the phrase: It’s not what you look at, it’s what you see when you’re looking.

The variety of poems Heard selected also reflects the variety of lenses a poet may use. Heard’s “Recipe for Writing an Autumn Poem” begins and remains in the poet’s eye. In contrast, Yolen’s “In My Desk” follows the narrator’s journey from seeing bland objects to discovering the poetry within these objects as they are connected to one’s life. Spinelli’s “Creativity” refers to visual art, but ultimately celebrates the creative journey of all art forms: observation, reflection, juxtaposition, and fresh connections all leading to something new and individual yet relating to us all.

Continuing the sense of lists, the book is tall, narrow and opens upward like a notepad designed for list making. One could quibble that while the majority of poems fall down the page like a list, a few are curiously turned 45 degrees so the reader must rotate the book. One entry that is intended to be read from the bottom up suffers from a confusion of design and directions. Regardless of minor problems with design, *Falling Down the Page* is a lively anthology and offers adults a vibrant opportunity to widen the world of their students and children.

### About the Author

**George Shannon** is the author of numerous picture books, and continues to work with children on their own creative writing both here and abroad. <http://www.georgeshannon.org>.